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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of an evaluation of a 2-day training workshop, that was designed to enhance professionals' skills in working with three- and four-year old children in developmentally appropriate ways. The participants included 22 administrators, 72 teachers, and 25 teacher aides at 6 different training sites in a southern state. A pre- and post-survey asked workshop participants to identify their programs' strengths and weaknesses in accordance with child development and theory, classroom management, curriculum development and planning, assessment, and parental involvement. All three groups cited the following strengths in their programs: staff, developmentally appropriate practices, parents, and facility. Prior to the training, 33 percent of the participants identified both curriculum and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) as strengths in their programs. Following the workshop, 57 percent and 66 percent identified their curriculum and DAP, respectively, as program weaknesses. Chi-square analysis revealed that the differences in strengths and weaknesses were a function of the professional role. It is concluded that preschool teachers need additional training and specific information regarding curriculum development, particularly in science. Training would also be useful for administrators and teaching assistants. Two tables are included. (Contains 13 references.) (LMI)

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Administrators', Teachers', and Teaching Assistants' Self-Evaluation of Pre-School Programs

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Abstract

A training institute, intended to enhance professionals' skills in working with young children, was examined to ascertain participants' perceptions of program strengths and weaknesses in accordance with: child development and theory; classroom management\discipline; curriculum development and planning; assessment; and parental involvement. Participants were 22 administrators, 72 teachers, and 25 teacher aides at six different training sites in a southern state. Strengths cited by all three included staff, developmentally appropriate practices, parents, and facility. Use of developmentally appropriate practices, cited initially as a strength, was cited more frequently as a weakness following the training workshop. Chi-squares revealed differences in strengths and weaknesses mentioned as a function of the professional role. Implications for programs and professionals working with young children will be discussed.

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Administrators', Teachers', and Teaching Assistants'

Self-Evaluation of Pre-School Programs

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional non-profit organization which encompasses 14 states and their respective affiliates. This organization directs its energies and resources toward improving the functioning of families, children, and professionals, particularly those persons involved with infants/children from birth through age eight. To accomplish this overall goal, SECA provides extensive training for its membership and does so through training institutes that have been established to address the specific needs and interests of those working with children of various ages.

One such training institute is entitled, "Developing and Maintaining an Appropriate Learning Environment for Three and Four-Year-Olds" (Cowles, Charlesworth, Martin, & Grace, 1992). The overall objective of this two-day training institute is to assist administrators, teachers, and teaching assistants in working with 3- and 4-year-old children in developmentally appropriate ways. The training includes the following components: 1) child development and theory (Cowles, 1991; Parten, 1932); 2) classroom management\discipline (Seefeldt, 1988); 3) curriculum development and planning (Bredekamp, 1992; Hendrick, 1990; Katz & Chard, 1989; Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990); 4) assessment (Charlesworth & Lind, 1990; Grace & Shores, 1991); and parental involvement (Charlesworth, 1992; Lawler, 1991; Silliman & Royston, 1990). Within each component, materials, background research, and adult activities are provided in the training manual. Visual aids (a slide presentation and a professionally developed videotape) also

accompany the training materials. Each trainer also provides additional printed materials as well as teacher-made materials to serve as appropriate examples for the teachers to follow.

A major foundation of this training institute is information from the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) guidelines (Bredekamp, 1992). Developmentally appropriate practices mean that practice is both age-appropriate and individually appropriate for each child. These guidelines include information regarding the curriculum, the specific types of materials and activities which should occur, teacher-student interaction styles, and information regarding working with parents and discipline.

At the onset of the training, participants are encouraged to share information regarding their present teaching or work-related position. They also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their respective programs. Throughout the training session, there is a great deal of small group sharing, problem-solving, reflection, and goal-setting. There are essentially three culminating activities designed to complete the training: 1) the (group) design of a thematic unit or "web;" 2) the identification of the participant's program strengths (based upon the information gained from the training; and, 3) the identification of the participant's program weaknesses, the resources needed for improvement, the method for improvement, along with the person(s) responsible for the improvement.

The purpose of the authors in conducting this study was to examine the SECA training participants' responses to the pre- and post- surveys conducted as a part of the training institute. A

secondary purpose of the authors in conducting this study was to identify program strengths and weaknesses as a result of the training. That is, we examined participants' perceptions of program strengths and weaknesses in accordance with: child development and theory; classroom management\discipline; curriculum development and planning; assessment; and parental involvement.

Method

Programs from which participants were involved included Arkansas Better Chance, Head Start, church-based, and private for-profit. Data from surveys were gathered from each participant prior to and following the two-day training institute. Participants were 22 administrators, 72 teachers, and 25 teacher aides at six different training sites in a southern state. The number of participants from each site was 20, 12, 32, 22, 26, and 7. Other than the information presented above, no other demographic data is available at this time.

Prior to the beginning of the training session at each site, participants were asked to take a few minutes to write their names, addresses, job descriptions, and years of teaching experience on an open-ended survey. Participants were then asked to identify possible strengths and weaknesses in their programs. Participants were assured that participation in this activity was voluntary and that no one would examine their responses but the researcher. Participants' responses to this pre-training survey were based upon their attitudes and knowledge prior to receiving any training from the attended institute.

Following completion of the institute, but also as a requirement of the institute (a follow-up activity to be completed by each participant prior to receiving a training institute certificate), participants were asked to identify strengths and weaknesses identified in their programs, as a result of the training. Forms on which this information could be recorded are included in the training institute manual. Participants identify specific weaknesses (in list format), strategies for correcting the weaknesses, resources for correcting the weaknesses, and methods for evaluating the improvements. In addition to writing this "plan" for improvement, participants identify strengths in their programs, based upon information gleaned from the training, and are encouraged to build upon those identified strengths.

These activities, pre- and post- surveys, were given to the trainer (researcher) at the end of the training. Participants included their mailing addresses so that this important data could be returned to them. The researcher then photocopied the data from each participant, began summarizing the data, and mailed the forms back to the participants. These procedures were followed at each site and following completion of each training institute.

Results

To determine whether statistically significant differences were present in the number of perceived program strengths and weaknesses as a function of group membership, analysis of variance (ANOVAs) procedures were conducted. No significant differences were present in the number of strengths, $F(1,2) = .99$, and number of weaknesses, $F(1,2), = 1.42$, reported by the three groups in the pre-workshop measure, $ps > .05$. That is, the number of perceived

program strengths and weaknesses identified by administrators (n of strengths = 3.0; n of weaknesses = 2.6), teachers (n of strengths = 2.8; n of weaknesses = 2.5), and teacher aides (n of strengths = 2.5; n of weaknesses = 2.1) was essentially the same. Similarly, no differences were present in the number of strengths, $F(1,2) = 1.47$, and number of weaknesses, $F(1,2) = .95$, reported by the three groups in the post-workshop measure, ps > .05. Again, administrators (n of strengths = 3.0; n of weaknesses = 2.9), teachers (n of strengths = 3.2; n of weaknesses = 2.5), and teacher aides (n of strengths = 2.6; n of weaknesses = 2.6) reported equivalent numbers of program strengths and weaknesses following the two-day training institute.

To ascertain whether differences were present between perceived program strengths and weaknesses pre- and post-workshop, several paired t-tests were conducted. Regarding administrators, paired t-tests indicated no significant differences in the number of strengths, $t(21) = .00$, and number of weaknesses, $t(21) = -1.07$, ps > .05, reported pre- and post-workshop. For teachers, paired t-tests revealed no significant differences between the number of strengths, $t(71) = -1.85$, and weaknesses, $t(71) = -.09$, ps > .05, reported pre- and post-workshop. For teacher aides, paired t-tests revealed no significant differences between the number of strengths, $t(24) = -.28$, and weaknesses, $t(24) = -1.73$, ps > .05, reported pre- and post-workshop. The workshop did not result in any significant changes in the number of participants' perceptions of program strengths or weaknesses.

Next, an analysis of perceived individual program strengths and weaknesses pre- and post-workshop for administrators,

teachers, and teacher aides was conducted. Table 1 depicts perceived program strengths and Table 2 depicts perceived program weaknesses. Strengths cited by all three groups included staff, developmentally appropriate practices, parents, and facility. Teachers and teacher aides also mentioned curriculum. Interestingly, 54% of administrators initially identified staff as a weakness, however, following the workshop, only 14% of administrators did so. Similarly, 24% of teachers initially perceived program administration as a weakness, but following the workshop, only 8% did. Use of developmentally appropriate practices, cited pre- and post-workshop as a strength, was cited more frequently as a weakness following the training workshop. Another individual program area that participants perceived as a weakness post-workshop was curriculum, an area closely related to DAP.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Discussion

Although no significant changes were determined in participants' perceptions of program strengths and weaknesses, findings which the researchers consider to be significant were identified. Two of the most important identified strengths and weaknesses were DAP and Curriculum. Although these items are interrelated, as well as key aspects of the training institute, they provide valuable information regarding participants' perceptions of their programs prior to, and following, training. It appeared that participants identified curriculum (moderately,

33%) as a strength, prior to training; approximately 57% identified curriculum as a weakness following the training. After examining what an appropriate curriculum for 3- and 4-year-old children entails, participants were more likely to recognize that change in their curricular practices needed to occur.

Prior to the training, approximately 33% of the participants identified DAP as a strength in their programs. Following training, approximately 66% listed DAP as a weakness in their programs that also needed to be changed. In-depth analysis of this item revealed that participants' knowledge of DAP was almost non-existent prior to the training. In addition, methods and materials for implementing a DAP curriculum were presented, discussed, and practiced throughout the training.

Implications

It appears that training did change participants' perceptions of quality components necessary for providing appropriate environments for young children. The implications determined from this research indicate that teachers of young children need additional training in order to provide high quality programs for young children. When further examination of the data were conducted, it also appears that specific information regarding curriculum development, particularly in the area of Science, is necessary and important. Essentially, this research implies that preschool teachers need additional training, that quality training can be successful in assisting teachers, administrators, and teaching assistants to improve their programs and recognize specific areas in which change should occur.

It should be noted, however, that participants' educational background and training were not identified, as a part of this study. Generally, preschool teachers and administrators do have training of some sort, but in order to meet state licensing requirements and other state guidelines, teachers are not required to hold teaching certificates in Early Childhood Education. It should also be noted that participants in this study may hold teaching certificates in Elementary Education, but that training does not prepare them in specific curriculum development nor teaching skills necessary when working with 3- and 4-year-olds.

Further study is necessary in order to link specific identified program weaknesses and strengths to teaching experience as well as prior education and training. Additional study is also needed regarding specific areas for growth in curriculum development.

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Table 1

Percentage of Respondents who Identified Each as a Strength Pre- and Post-Workshop.

Strength	Administration		Teachers		Teacher Aides	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
1. Staff	68.2	54.5	62.5	37.5	60.0	52.0
2. Facility	40.9	27.3	22.2	31.9	24.0	28.0
3. Children	22.7	0.0	25.0	18.1	12.0	8.0
4. Parents	45.5	45.5	19.4	36.1	24.0	32.0
5. Curriculum	31.8	27.3	37.5	48.6	36.0	32.0
6. Community Resources	13.6	4.5	1.4	2.8	4.0	4.0
7. Teacher-Student ratios	4.5	4.5	6.9	4.2	0.0	0.0
8. Discipline/management	18.2	13.6	22.2	22.2	12.0	24.0
9. Atmosphere	13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
10. DAP	22.7	68.2	37.5	66.7	32.0	52.0
11. Commitment	0.0	4.5	1.4	5.6	4.0	0.0
12. Services	4.5	13.6	6.9	2.8	21.0	12.0
13. Scheduling	4.5	4.5	5.6	9.7	4.0	0.0
14. Administration	9.1	27.3	16.7	6.9	8.0	8.0
16. Planning	0.0	4.5	11.1	9.7	4.0	0.0
17. Aides			1.4	1.4	0.0	0.0
18. Interactions			4.2	11.1	8.0	8.0

Table 2

Percentage of Respondents who Identified Each as a Weakness Pre- and Post-Workshop.

Weakness	Administration		Teachers		Teacher Aides	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
2. Facility	22.7	18.2	36.1	23.6	36.0	20.0
3. Curriculum	31.8	54.5	31.9	61.1	12.0	56.0
4. DAP	22.7	63.6	40.3	69.4	20.0	72.0
5. Discipline/management	27.3	36.4	29.2	19.4	12.0	24.0
6. Administration	27.3	22.7	23.6	8.3	20.0	12.0
7. Staff	54.5	13.6	20.8	9.7	44.0	24.0
8. Parents	36.4	45.5	19.4	33.3	24.0	32.0
9. Services	0.0	0.0	5.6	1.4	0.0	0.0
10. Planning	13.6	18.2	27.8	16.7	8.0	8.0
11. Scheduling	13.6	9.1	6.9	6.9	16.0	12.0
12. Teacher-Student ratios	4.5	0.0	6.9	2.8	20.0	4.0